

My bill would also provide training and resources to assist State, local, and Tribal law enforcement in addressing those threats. I am sure communities across this Nation could use that support.

And there is the issue of how these terrorist acts are committed. Last night's attack near Atlanta was a mass shooting, a uniquely American threat. Next week, the Senate Judiciary Committee, which I chair, will hold a hearing on gun violence in America. Too many people get shot in America—not just near Atlanta but in the cities of Chicago and St. Louis and all across our country. How many times have we seen images in those communities like we did last night of another mass shooting? America is better than this.

We need to take action to reduce the number of gun deaths in this Nation. We are going to get to work in the Senate Judiciary Committee to try to find some common, bipartisan ground to address it. Maybe we will fail. I hope we succeed. We have to try.

It is time for the Senate to stop cowering before any special interest group and pass commonsense gun safety policy. To the people of Atlanta, to members of the AAPI community, and all across America, we are standing with you. We are grieving with you. We will do everything in our power to protect you.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Madam President, our Nation is at a critical moment in our fight against COVID-19. We have seen declining infections, declining hospitalizations and deaths. And thanks to three effective vaccines—and, perhaps, more on the way—and adherence to social distancing and mask wearing, this new administration has put together a comprehensive plan to address and defeat this virus, but we aren't out of the woods yet.

In the United States, we have less than 5 percent of the world's population and 20 percent of the COVID cases and deaths. We can continue to see 50,000 to 60,000 new COVID cases every day. We still have approximately 4,700 people hospitalized because of COVID in the United States. We still tragically lose 1,200 American lives each day.

While access is improving greatly, we still see too many people struggling to get a vaccine. If we are going to defeat this virus once and for all, we need our top public health officials in place on the job.

Yet our Republican colleagues continue to block the nomination of Xavier Becerra to head the Department of Health and Human Services, the chief Federal Agency responsible for our public health response to COVID. Their campaign to leave the top public health position in this Nation empty in the midst of a pandemic is unwise. It has to come to an end.

It has been 3 months—3 months—since President Biden announced that he would nominate Mr. Becerra to

serve as Secretary of Health and Human Services. A majority of Senators support his nomination. I do. He is a personal friend and someone I have known for years. He is extremely competent and ready for the job.

Yet Republican Senators continue to delay Xavier Becerra's nomination day after day after day. Their objections to him are all over the map. They say they oppose him because of his support for the Affordable Care Act. Remember that one—President Obama's Affordable Care Act, which took half of the people who were uninsured in America and gave them the protection of health insurance, maybe for the first time in their lives. It provided health coverage to more than 20 million Americans. It has been a lifeline to families nationwide.

Most people would say: Thank goodness Mr. Becerra supported it. For a man who wants to be Secretary of HHS, you would almost insist on that. And yet Republicans oppose his nomination because of that, and they also don't like the fact that he was the attorney general of California and he enforced the State's COVID-19 rules. How can defending public health rules disqualify a person who wants to be America's top public health official?

We are in the midst of a lethal pandemic that has claimed nearly 530,000 American lives. More people are infected and dying every day. Is this any time to play politics with the Department of Health and Human Services? I don't think so.

Xavier Becerra is an effective manager, a smart, thoughtful, passionate leader. He is the right person to lead the Department. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives for more than two decades. As California's top prosecutor in 2017, he took on the tobacco companies and the opioid manufacturers—three cheers for him in both instances—and he helped defend healthcare for families, women, and the LGBTQ community.

In his confirmation hearing, Mr. Becerra highlighted his commitment to serving all Americans by expanding access to health insurance, lowering prescription drug prices, improving rural healthcare, and addressing racial and ethnic disparities in care. Would you expect anything less from a man who wants to lead our public health effort?

When he is finally confirmed this week, after this unconscionable delay—and he will be confirmed—he will be the first Latino to serve as Secretary of HHS. His historic confirmation will be especially meaningful at this moment in time when Latinos are disproportionately affected by the medical and economic impact of COVID.

Delaying his confirmation only hurts our Nation—still struggling to beat this pandemic; still working to get everyone vaccinated, to get our schools open, and everybody back to work. Sadly, these Republican Senators who have led this charge against him are

demonstrating obstructionism at its worst and at the worst moment.

I look forward to confirming Xavier Becerra to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SMITH). The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. While my colleague Senator DURBIN is here, there is a real irony here to say that our Republican friends are not going to support Xavier Becerra because of his support of the Affordable Care Act. One key ingredient of the Affordable Care Act is actually the exchanges to provide for those who don't have access to coverage from their employer or some other way to get in a group.

But that was an idea that was introduced in 1993 by 23 Republican Senators—23 Republican Senators—as an alternative to HillaryCare, and it never got anywhere. It never went anywhere until an enterprising Governor from Massachusetts—I heard about him—said: Here is a way one can enforce this and provide opportunities for the people to get healthcare coverage that otherwise wouldn't have it. He said this might work. And they introduced it as RomneyCare in the State of Massachusetts. And do you know what? It worked. It made healthcare coverage available to a lot of people, and it helped on the affordability side too.

For our Republican friends to say that is the reason why—his support for the ACA, a key ingredient of which is the exchange—is an irony here. So I hope it is not lost on our friends.

I thank Senator DURBIN for those comments.

Like my friend Senator DURBIN, I, too, rise in support of Attorney General Xavier Becerra, a longtime public servant and President Biden's nominee to be our next Secretary of Health and Human Service.

For a year now, I have been saying to anybody who would listen that the only way to really get our economy back on track, to put parents back to work, kids back in the classroom, and life back to normal in the United States of America is to do all that we can to put this devastating pandemic in our Nation's rearview mirror. That means vaccinating as many at-risk Americans as safely and as quickly as possible.

In fact, under the leadership of our new President, America is leading the way in the production and the distribution of vaccines. How about that—leading the world?

Each day we are breaking records on the number of new Americans who are being vaccinated. After going through one of the darkest periods in American history, we are finally beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. But as we ramp up for actual distribution throughout America and help make sure that all people—all people from rural communities to urban cities—have equitable access to lifesaving vaccines, we need to make sure that the

Department of Health and Human Services has the right leader at the helm going forward. And for my money and my judgment, that leader is Xavier Becerra. I believe he is the right person for this job at this point in our Nation's history.

As a key member of the Biden administration, he will work with the White House. He will work with us in the Congress to tackle the coronavirus pandemic and to coordinate our Nation's response to it.

Just as he has done throughout his career, he will fight to expand affordable healthcare, address persistent health disparities, and restore HHS's mission to protect the health and well-being of all Americans.

Madam President, I have heard several of my Republican colleagues calling into question Xavier Becerra's—Attorney General Becerra's qualifications to serve as HHS Secretary. Obviously they are free to express their concerns. As Senators, it is our duty to vet and evaluate Cabinet nominees and make sure that we believe they are going to be best able to serve the American people. I take the responsibility seriously. I know our Presiding Officer does as well. But let me set the record straight, if I could, on Xavier Becerra. I am confident that with his decades of experience working on healthcare issues in Congress and as California's attorney general, he will be an invaluable part of President Biden's administration as we work together to combat the pandemic nationally.

Some of the critics on the other side of the aisle say: What does he know about healthcare? Well, as it turns out, he served for I want to say two decades on the House Committee on Ways and Means. The last time I checked—you may want to double-check me on this—I think the primary responsibility of that committee is Medicare, and for somebody who served that long on that committee, I bet he knows a thing or two about Medicare. As it turns out, he does.

Throughout his career in public service, Xavier Becerra has shown an unwavering commitment to protecting and expanding healthcare availability for millions of American families and workers, especially those in vulnerable communities who remain underserved.

In the House of Representatives, he was a senior member of the Ways and Means Committee, which helped to make the Affordable Care Act, which is based on a Republican idea, I think out of the Heritage Foundation in 1993 that, as I mentioned earlier, MITT ROMNEY helped make a household word in the State of Massachusetts when he was Governor there. And I think half of the people who had healthcare coverage—who didn't have it when we created the ACA have it. They have it today. We cut in half the number of people who don't have access to healthcare coverage.

In the State of Delaware, the cost of coverage is actually dropping in the ex-

changes. It has dropped by I think 19 percent over the last 2 years alone, as market forces are taking place and taking hold.

As attorney general of California, as has been mentioned, he led the charge for a coalition of States to defend the Affordable Care Act against multiple attempts by the Trump administration to dismantle this landmark legislation altogether.

I once asked somebody—I asked him. I said: What is it about your experience that would suggest you could run a big operation like the Department of Health and Human Services?

He said: Well, I have run the Department of Justice in California. It is the second largest Department of Justice in the country, second only to the Federal Department of Justice.

I forget how many thousands—maybe tens of thousands—of employees they have, but it is a huge operation in a huge State with a ton of people.

Xavier Becerra brought together attorneys general from both sides of the aisle to hold opioid manufacturers accountable for the addiction crisis that we are still struggling with.

When the pandemic hit, he went to bat for Californians on everything from protections for our workers from exposure to COVID-19, increasing transparency in nursing homes, to securing key safeguards for the rights of frontline healthcare personnel.

His past leadership is a major reason why President Biden is asking him today to accept the responsibilities of overseeing responses to many of our Nation's most urgent needs, including the distribution of COVID-19 vaccinations, restoring the public confidence in vital public health institutions, and boosting family health and financial security in the wake of the pandemic.

With so much of the COVID-19 response being executed at the State and local levels, we are fortunate that President Biden has chosen as his HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra, a leader with relevant, on-the-ground, State-based experience.

As a former State treasurer, former Governor, former chairman of the National Governors Association, to have somebody with this kind of State-based experience, what a blessing that would be.

As the head of the largest State department of justice in the Nation, overseeing thousands of employees, Attorney General Becerra has a proven track record and the management experience necessary to take on the massive operations at HHS. He will also make, as Senator DURBIN has mentioned, history as the first Latino American to take on this role, providing important perspective as Latinos and other minority communities continue to be disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

As we try to make sure that about a third of the American people who are saying they are not going to take the vaccine—they don't care; they are going to take a chance—and a lot of

those people are Latino—wouldn't it be nice to have a Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services who could reach out to that community, literally reach out to them and touch them and convince them that, no, this is something they should do; they should take this chance and be glad they did.

Four years ago, this body confirmed President Trump's nominee for Health and Human Services within just 20 days—20 days from the start of his administration. We knew then that this role was important to fill. It took us 20 days.

Now, in the midst of a deadly pandemic, one that has taken the lives of over 530,000 Americans—a toll that exceeds the number of American deaths on the battlefields of World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam war, in which I served—we cannot afford to let another day go by without confirming Xavier Becerra.

With all of that, I just want to say, colleagues, it is time. It is over time, and we need to confirm Xavier. I think—in fact, I am convinced he will do a good job. He will make us proud. We need him. The President needs him. And with him on board as the leader of HHS, he can go to work on behalf of the American people and put this pandemic behind us for good, and we need that day to come soon.

I don't see anybody else waiting to speak. I think maybe I should suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NO HATE ACT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, we are working today in the shadow of a truly hideous, horrific series of murders that occurred yesterday in Atlanta, GA, and I want to start by expressing my sympathies to the families that are affected, families of innocent women who were gunned down heinously by a murderer there. Eight lives were taken by that gunman, six of them Asian women.

There is an active, ongoing investigation, and I have no intention of prejudging the outcome. Justice must be done, and I have confidence in the law enforcement authorities of Atlanta that they will assure that justice is done.

So we don't know for sure what the gunman's motivation was, but we know eight of the women were Asian, and we know for sure that this horrific shooting rampage is only the latest egregious incident in a sickening, despicable trend of anti-Asian-American, or AAPI, violence that has terrorized the Asian-American community over recent months.

And we know many of these incidents were, in fact, hate crimes motivated by